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ABSTRACT

Language planning is official, government-level activity concerning the selection and promotion of a unified administrative language or languages. Language planning initiatives arise in response to sociopolitical needs and attempt to meet those needs by reducing linguistic diversity. Several stages occur in the language planning process. The first stage, needs analysis, involves the selection of the language or language variety. The next stages are called "status planning" and include codification and standardization. Fine-tuning the selected language or language variety is called "corpus planning" and includes elaboration and cultivation. Specific areas of language use that are affected by language planning decisions include writing systems, lexicon, and syntax. Responses from educational systems to language planning decisions include monolingual instructional programs, transitional bilingual education programs, language maintenance programs, and immersion programs. Many different groups of people are involved in language planning initiatives, including sociologists, political scientists, educators, linguists, writers, and national language academies. The status of language planning in the United States is described. (DJD)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

Language Policy and Planning

Prepared by David Robinson

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What Is Language Planning?

Language planning is official, government-level activity concerning the selection and promotion of a unified administrative language or languages. It represents a coherent effort by individuals, groups, or organizations to influence language use or development.

Why Is Language Planning Needed?

Language policy and planning decisions arise in response to sociopolitical needs. Language planning decisions may be required, for example, where a number of linguistic groups compete for access to the mechanisms of day-to-day life, or where a particular linguistic minority is denied access to such mechanisms. Two examples of such decisions are the Court Interpreters Act, which provides an interpreter to any victim, witness, or defendant whose native language is not English, and the Voting Rights Act of 1975, which provides for bilingual ballots in areas where over 5% of the population speak a language other than English. Both governmental and social institutions must effectively and equitably meet the needs of the population so that groups varied in linguistic repertoire have an equal opportunity to participate in their government and to receive services from their government.

Language planning decisions typically attempt to meet these needs by reducing linguistic diversity, as in instances where a single language is declared a national language in a multilingual country (such as Bahasa Indonesia in Indonesia) or where a single variety of a language is declared "standard" to promote linguistic unity in a country where divergent dialects exist. For example, although many dialects of Chinese exist, the promotion of a single variety as the national language contributes to a sense of national unity.

What Are the Stages of Language Planning?

Language planning efforts typically include several stages. The first stage is a needs analysis, involving a sociopolitical analysis of communication patterns within the society. The next stages in the language planning process involve the selection of a language or language variety for planning purposes. These stages are sometimes referred to as "status planning" and include:

❑ **Codification.** Characteristics or criteria of a "good" language are established.

❑ **Standardization.** A unified variety of the language is established, if necessary.

"Fine-tuning" the selected language or language variety is referred to as "corpus planning" and includes the following stages:

❑ **Elaboration.** Any of a variety of developments, including expansion of vocabulary, expansion of stylistic repertoire, and creation of type fonts, allow the language to function in a greater range of circumstances.

❑ **Cultivation.** The establishment of arbiters, such as dictionaries or language academies, maintains and advances the status of the language.

In addition to the establishment and implementation of changes through status and corpus planning, evaluation and feedback provide a mechanism for determining how well the language planning efforts are progressing.

What Specific Areas of Language Use Do These Stages Affect?

Language planning may affect all areas of language use but typically concentrates on the more observable ones.

❑ **Writing.** The written form of a language may have to be developed, modified, or standardized. For example, Turkish was written for centuries with the Arabic alphabet, which does not represent vowels. Since Turkish has eight vowels, writing with the Arabic alphabet was very difficult, and, in the 1920s, Ataturk responded to this problem by mandating that Turkish be written using the Roman alphabet.

❑ **Lexicon.** The vocabulary of a language may need to expand to keep pace with increasing technological development. For example, the primary function of institutions such as the Swedish Center for Technical Terminology is to coordinate standard spoken and written forms for new terminology in media, government, and industry.

❑ **Syntax.** The syntax of the language may need to expand as the language takes on a national function. Tok Pisin started as a pidgin in Papua New Guinea. However, as Tok Pisin became a lingua franca for the New Guinea area, the small vocabulary, restricted syntax, and lack of tense markings forced a necessary syntactic development of the former pidgin to accommodate the more widespread use of the language in legal documents and in governmental proceedings.

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How Do Educational Systems Respond to Language Planning Legislation?

The response of educational systems to government language planning legislation may either promote or reduce linguistic diversity. Responses that reduce linguistic diversity include:

- **Monolingual instruction** in the target language.
- **Transitional bilingual education,** in which instruction time in the child's native language is gradually reduced.

Responses that promote linguistic diversity include:

- **Language maintenance programs** that emphasize equally the child's native language and culture and the target language and culture.
- **Immersion programs**, such as the St. Lambert program in Quebec, where English-speaking children are taught in an entirely French-speaking environment (Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

Who Is Involved in Language Planning Efforts?

Because language planning typically responds to problems that are sociopolitical in nature, sociologists or political scientists may first identify and assess the need for some sort of action.

Linguists can properly participate in the needs assessment stage to determine if the languages or dialects chosen adequately address the problem. Linguists may suggest ways in which syntax or morphology may be standardized, or may assist in expanding technical vocabularies.

Educators incorporate language planning legislation into action and develop programs to fulfill the needs identified.

Writers keep up the tradition of writing in a dying language or complete written works in a previously unwritten language. This stylistic expansion makes possible the formulation of governmental documents in the planned language.

National language academies may oversee one or more phases of the language planning process. For example, the Académie Française works for continued cultivation of the French language largely through attempts at purification. The Turkish Linguistic Society pursues the continued codification and standardization of Turkish through the elimination of Arabic and Persian influences.

What Is the Status of Language Planning in the United States?

The *de facto* national language of the United States is English. However, increasing immigration has resulted in large and viable communities in the United States whose native language is not English.

The changing linguistic composition of the population has resulted in legislative action, such as the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII) of 1968 and the provision of bilingual ballots, aimed at ensuring that non-English speakers have equal access to participation in government and society. Other legislation, such as the proposed English Language Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and California's 1986 Proposition 63, is aimed at restricting the official use of languages other than English and promoting the official status of English alone.

What Are Some Future Challenges for the United States?

As the recent proliferation of efforts to legislate problems of language difference attests, language planning is becoming more and more essential in an increasingly multilingual society. A coherent and informed legislative response to the social and political questions raised by the changing composition of the population is needed so that legislators and educators can make informed choices about language policy in areas such as educational policy and access to basic services.

For Further Reading

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